

# Recent observations from Xinjiang Autonomous Region, China, 16 June to 5 July 1988

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The birds seen in Xinjiang (Sinkiang) Autonomous Region, China, between 16 June and 5 July, 1988 are documented, including the first records for China of Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* and Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides*, and the second record for China of Eurasian Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*.

From the 16 June to 5 July 1988 the authors visited, as tourists, the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of western China. Time was spent mainly in the plains along the northern rim of the Tarim Basin and in the vicinity of Bosten Lake.

There is very little published information on the birds of this area. W. L. Abbott visited the northern Tarim Basin in the autumn of 1893 (Richmond 1895) and F. Ludlow collected in the northern basin between Kashi (Kashgar) and Jam near Aksu between 17 November 1929 and 13 April 1930, and again from 15 to 29 September 1930, and also documented the observations and collections of G. Sherriff (Ludlow and Kinnear 1933-1934). Cheng (1987) has summarised other relevant information. Of particular interest, and providing considerable motivation for the visit, was the presence in this part of China of two species of ground jay *Podoces*, namely Henderson's *P. hendersoni* and Biddulph's *P. biddulphi*.

## LOCALITIES VISITED

The following were the main localities visited with a brief description of the habitats found.

Where possible, place names used in the text follow the spelling in the *Times atlas of the world* (6th edition), with the names used by Ludlow and Kinnear (1933-1934) in parentheses.

### 1. Kashi (Kashgar) Oasis; 18-23 June.

This is an extensive and fertile oasis, up to 120 km wide. Birdwatching was concentrated in the following areas:

- (i) Agricultural land west of the city, typical of the oasis with fields mainly of wheat lined by rows of tall poplars *Populus*.
- (ii) A tributary of the Kashi River (the first river that bisects the oasis to the south-west of the city) flanked mainly by rice paddies and grazing pasture. Of particular interest was the northern bank, down-river from

the main Kashi to Sufu road, where there is a large area of reed- and sedge-beds (some on abandoned rice paddies) with cultivated and fallow paddies lined with rows of willow *Salix*. The river is fast-flowing, broken by gravel- and sand-banks.

- (iii) An area of stony desert with sparse low vegetation and low bare hills at Wupah, approximately 50 km south-west of Kashi. This area was visited because it was believed to be Opel, where Sherriff collected Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni* in 1930 (Ludlow and Kinnear 1933-1934).
- (iv) An area of stony desert, tamarisk scrub, dry cultivation, and paddy fields, marshes and grazing pastures along a small river, west of Sufu and approximately 30 km south-west of Kashi.
- (v) An area of stony desert with low scrub and dry cultivation around the abandoned town of Hanoi, on the eastern edge of the Kashi oasis.

## 2. Aqal Oasis and surrounding desert; 25-27 June.

An elongated oasis west of Aksu; less intensively cultivated than large parts of the Kashi Oasis with many fallow and overgrown fields. To the north of the oasis is a stretch of the piedmont gravel zone (that forms a continuous band between the sandy Taklimakan Desert and the barren foothills of the Tian Shan), where Henderson's Ground Jay was searched for. To the south, is sandy desert that in parts is quite densely vegetated with shrubs including tamarisk *Tamarix* and in other parts is very degraded due to grazing by camels and the removal of vegetation for firewood and fodder.

## 3. Bosten Lake; 1-3 July.

One of China's largest freshwater lakes. There are extensive reedbeds, particularly on the western side where there are numerous small lakes and meandering canals. The reedbeds provide the raw material for a large paper-making industry in Korla. At the edge of the reedbeds there are cattle-grazing marshes. Time was spent in the south-western corner, staying at the western pumping station, where there is a large fish-rearing pond.

## 4. Puhui Oasis and surrounding desert; 4-5 July.

A new and rapidly expanding state farm on the outskirts of the main Korla Oasis (52 km from the city). Time was spent at a small salt lake surrounded by freshwater marshes to the west of the village; at a desert poplar forest (apparently a protected area) along the Kongi (Peacock) River with freshwater pools and marshes and a large freshwater reservoir, and in the sandy desert between Puhui and the Korla Oasis. The desert west of Puhui is heavily exploited for firewood and camel grazing.

**Plate 1.** Poplar *Populus* sp. forest, Puhui (breeding habitat of Saxual Sparrow). Photo: Helen Taylor.



**Plate 2.** Severely degraded desert, Puhui. Photo: Helen Taylor.



**Plate 3.** Vegetated desert, Puhui. Ground Jay habitat. Photo: Helen Taylor.





## OBSERVATIONS OF PARTICULAR INTEREST

**COLLARED PRATINCOLE** *Glareola pratincola* Two birds were seen in an area of paddy fields, c.30 km south-west of Kashi on 21 June. The birds were in full breeding plumage. They were seen well and showed red under wing-coverts (eliminating Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*), and dull-brown breast (not peachy-orange) and the tail-streamers extended back as far as the folded wing-tips (thus eliminating Oriental Pratincole *G. maldivarum*). This species is not listed in Cheng (1987) and this record would seem to constitute the first for China.

**SAVI'S WARBLER** *Locustella luscinioides* At least four birds were found singing in the *Phragmites* beds along a tributary of the Kashi River, south-west of Kashi city, between 18 and 23 June. One bird was seen very well and tape-recorded. It was olive-brown above, with creamy-white throat and supercilium and brownish-buff on the underparts, with darker undertail coverts and faint paler fringes to under tail-covert feathers. The song was a low monotonous insect-like trill, characteristic of the species. A further one to two birds were heard singing at Bosten Lake on 2 July.

This species is not listed in Cheng (1987), but is mentioned as a species recorded by Sudilovskaya in the Tien Shan, although not confirmed for China, by Cheng (1976), and these would seem to constitute the first documented records for China. The species was recorded at the same locality at Kashi by H. Dissing, S. Jensen and M. F. Jørgensen in July 1989 (Dissing *et al.* 1990).

**EURASIAN REED-WARBLER** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* At least eight birds were seen or heard singing in the *Phragmites* beds along a tributary of the Kashi River south of Kashi between 18 and 23 June. Several birds were seen well and tape-recorded. One bird was seen feeding a recently fledged juvenile on 19th. The adults were dull grey-brown above including rump, without any obvious rufous, olive or greenish tones, and greyish-white on the underparts; legs were grey; primary projection appeared as long as the length of exposed tertials. The rambling and scratching song was characteristic of the species, and the tape-recording has been compared with the recorded songs of other *Acrocephalus* warblers to eliminate similar species. A further two birds were heard singing at Bosten Lake on 2 July.

This species is listed by Cheng (1987) as a vagrant on the basis of a record for Zhenjiang, Jiangsu Province on 9 October 1921 (Kolthoff 1932). These observations would seem to constitute the only other records for China and the first breeding record for the country. The species was recorded at the same locality at Kashi by H. Dissing *et al.* in July 1989 (Dissing *et al.* 1990).

## OTHER OBSERVATIONS

A full list of species recorded in Xinjiang between 16 June and 5 July 1988 is

given in the appendix. Of special interest are the records of Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus* and Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata*, which are described as very rare in China (Cheng 1987), and White-winged Woodpecker *Picoides leucopterus*, Saxaul Sparrow *Passer ammodendri* and Biddulph's Ground Jay *Podoces biddulphi*, which are central Asian specialities. Despite searching in what was thought to be suitable habitat, there were no sightings of Henderson's Ground Jay *Podoces hendersoni*.

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## APPENDIX

LIST OF BIRDS RECORDED IN XINJIANG AUTONOMOUS  
REGION, CHINA, 16 JUNE-5 JULY 1988

Species	Locality				Remarks
	1	2	3	4	
Black-necked Grebe <i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>				*	5+ at the salt lake, Puhui. Described as rare in China (Cheng 1987).
Great Crested Grebe <i>Podiceps cristatus</i>			*	*	30+ at Bosten Lake, some with young; pair with young at Puhui.
Great Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>			*	*	
Great Bittern <i>Botaurus stellaris</i>			*		3 sightings plus another two 'booming' at Bosten Lake.
Little Bittern <i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	*		*		1 female along River Kashi; 7 seen at Bosten Lake and probably fairly common at this site and most likely breeding. Described as very rare in China, as a migrant and winter visitor to Xinjiang Aut. Reg.(Cheng 1987).
Great Egret <i>Egretta alba</i>			*	*	
Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>			*	*	
Black Stork <i>Ciconia nigra</i>				*	At least 5 at Puhui and frequently seen soaring over the poplar forest which is suitable breeding habitat. Described as rare in China (Cheng 1987).
Ruddy Shelduck <i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>			*	*	100+, including many juveniles on the salt lake at Puhui.
Common Shelduck <i>Tadorna tadorna</i>				*	40+, including many flightless young on the salt lake at Puhui.
Mallard <i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>			*		
Gadwall <i>Anas strepera</i>			*		Commonest duck at Bosten Lake.
Northern Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>			*		
Garganey <i>Anas querquedula</i>			*	*	
Red-crested Pochard <i>Netta rufina</i>			*		
Ferruginous Pochard <i>Aythya nyroca</i>			*	*	
Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>		*	*	*	
Western Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>			*		
Common Buzzard <i>Buteo buteo</i>		*	*		
Long-legged Buzzard <i>Buteo rufinus</i>				*	2 displaying over the desert at Puhui.
Booted Eagle <i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	*		*	*	At least two birds over the main Kashi Oasis. Two birds at Puhui, one displaying and calling over the poplar forest. Described as very rare in China, breeding only in Xinjiang Region (Cheng 1987).
Eurasian Kestrel <i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	*	*	*	*	
Northern Hobby <i>Falco subbuteo</i>	*				
Common Pheasant <i>Phasianus colchicus</i>			*		Male and female with at least one chick.
Houbara Bustard <i>Chlamydotis undulata</i>			*		Seen well, about 10 km south into the sandy desert from Aqal. Described as very rare in China (Cheng 1987).
Water Rail <i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	*				
Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>			*	*	

Species	Locality				Remarks
	1	2	3	4	
Northern Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	*		*		One bird displaying at Kashi.
Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	*		*		Observed displaying along Kashi River; chicks and juveniles at Bosten Lake.
Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>			*	*	20+ at the salt lake, Puhui including several chicks.
Common Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	*		*	*	75+ at Bosten Lake, including many recently fledged juveniles
Marsh Sandpiper <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>			*		
Common Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i>			*	*	
Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>		*	*		
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	*				
Terek Sandpiper <i>Xenus cinereus</i>			*		
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>			*	*	100+ at Bosten Lake, including many juveniles and chicks; common and holding territory at the salt lake, Puhui.
Collared Pratincole <i>Glareola pratincola</i>	*				See main text
Common Black-headed Gull <i>Larus ridibundus</i>			*	*	Many juveniles at Bosten Lake, but breeding not proven.
Yellow-legged Gull <i>Larus cachinnans</i>		*	*	*	Many juveniles at Bosten Lake, but breeding not proven.
Whiskered Tern <i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>		*			Fairly common at Bosten Lake, all in summer plumage although no evidence of breeding. According to Cheng (1987) there are no confirmed records of this species for Xinjiang Region.
Gull-billed Tern <i>Gelocheilidon nilotica</i>	*				Parties of 4 and 5 west up Kashi River.
Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i>	*		*	*	Almost certainly breeding at Bosten Lake, where one juvenile was seen, and at Puhui, where there was a small colony on an island in the salt lake.
Little Tern <i>Sterna albifrons</i>	*		*	*	At least 20 pairs breeding on the fish-rearing pond close to the pumping station at Bosten Lake; many with chicks. Breeding suspected at Puhui, where there was a small colony on an island in the salt lake.
Pallas's Sandgrouse <i>Syrhaptes paradoxus</i>			*		75-100 in two large flocks, and several small groups, coming down to drink at freshwater streams entering the salt lake at Puhui.
European Turtle-Dove <i>Streptopelia turtur</i>			*		
Oriental Turtle Dove <i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>			*		
Collared Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	*				
Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	*				Described as rare in China by Cheng (1987).
Common Cuckoo <i>Cuculus canorus</i>	*	*		*	
Little Owl <i>Athene noctua</i>				*	
Common Swift <i>Apus apus</i>	*	*	*	*	
Common Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	*	*	*	*	
Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i>	*	*	*	*	
White-winged Woodpecker <i>Picoides leucopterus</i>				*	At least three in the desert poplar forest at Puhui.
Asian Short-toed Lark <i>Calandrella cheleensis</i>	*	*	*	*	
Crested Lark <i>Galerida cristata</i>	*	*	*	*	
Sand Martin <i>Riparia riparia</i>	*				
Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	*	*	*	*	

Species	Locality				Remarks
	1	2	3	4	
Yellow-hooded Wagtail <i>Motacilla citreola</i>	*		*		Very common at Bosten Lake, many with young.
White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba</i>	*	*	*		
Isabelline Shrike <i>Lanius isabellinus</i>	*	*	*	*	Juveniles at Kashi, Aqal, and Bosten Lake.
Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>			*	*	
Bluethroat <i>Erithacus svecicus</i>	*		*	*	Recently fledged juveniles at Kashi; many singing at Bosten Lake.
Desert Wheatear <i>Oenanthe deserti</i>	*	*		*	Recently fledged juveniles at Kashi.
Isabelline Wheatear <i>Oenanthe isabellina</i>	*	*		*	Recently fledged juveniles at Kashi.
Bearded Tit <i>Panurus biarmicus</i>			*		Common at Bosten Lake, including many juveniles.
Savi's Warbler <i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	*		*		see main text.
Eurasian Reed-Warbler <i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	*		*		see main text.
Paddyfield Warbler <i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>	*		*	*	
Great Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	*		*	*	
Booted Warbler <i>Hippolais caligata</i>		*			5+ males holding territory in a poplar grove in Aqal town. Described as rare in China (Cheng 1987).
Barred Warbler <i>Sylvia nisoria</i>		*			Common at Puhui. Described as rare in China (Cheng 1987).
Desert Lesser Whitethroat <i>Sylvia curruca minula</i>		*			4+ males holding territory in the gravel desert to north of Aqal.
Desert Warbler <i>Sylvia nana</i>		*			
Chinese Hill Warbler <i>Rhopophilus pekinensis</i>				*	
Red-headed Bunting <i>Emberiza bruniceps</i>	*	*		*	Common in the agricultural land between Korla and Puhui; otherwise single males at Kashi and Aqal. Described as rare in China (Cheng 1987).
Common Reed-Bunting <i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	*		*		
Desert Finch <i>Rhodopechys obsoleta</i>		*			
Saxaul Sparrow <i>Passer ammodendri</i>	*	*		*	Single bird at Hanoi, Kashi on 22.6.88; 7 in the desert south of Aqal; common in the desert poplar forest and surrounding desert at Puhui where a pair was seen feeding young with black berries from a desert shrub, in hole about 2m up in a desert poplar.
Spanish Sparrow <i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	*	*			
Eurasian Tree Sparrow <i>Passer montanus</i>	*	*	*		
Common Starling <i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		*	*		
Eurasian Golden-Oriole <i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	*	*			
Black-billed Magpie <i>Pica pica</i>	*				
Biddulph's Ground Jay <i>Podoces biddulphi</i>				*	Family party of at least 6 in the desert between Korla and Puhui. For further information see Grimmett (1991).
Carion Crow <i>Corvus corone</i>	*		*		

## Key

Locality 1 = Kashi Oasis and surrounding desert; Locality 2 = Aqal Oasis and surrounding desert; Locality 3 = Bosten Lake; Locality 4 = Puhui Oasis and surrounding desert.

\* = recorded